



La Plata County
Colorado



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For additional information:

Please contact the Joint Information Center at 970-812-3351

August 13, 2015

12:00 p.m.

Update on Local Response to Gold King Mine Impact to La Plata County – Irrigation Ditches Flushed, Turbid Water Expected Today

Durango, CO – Wednesday evening EPA officials, La Plata County Director of Emergency Management Butch Knowlton, and ditch operators began inspecting and flushing select irrigation ditches. This is a measured step towards opening irrigation for farmers and ranchers who depend on Animas River water for their crops and livestock. In the North Animas Valley, the Reid Ditch and West Animas Ditch were flushed yesterday while the EPA, Coast Guard, and tribal officials currently work on additional ditches south of Durango.

“The two ditches north of Durango had very little sediment, but after opening the head gates for flushing, those ditches produced a slight, temporary change in color of the Animas River, as we expected, that should arrive in Durango City limits mid-day today” said Knowlton.

Operators of ditches that take water from the Animas River are asked to call the Call Center at 970-385-8700, open from 8am – 6pm, and provide names and phone numbers so officials can coordinate opening of the river head gates. Individual water users on the ditches and canals are asked to keep their gates closed until notified.

Despite the opening of the ditches, owners of livestock are cautioned against allowing livestock watering until the sediment has passed from the ditches and canals. Butch Knowlton has requested additional involvement from veterinary science experts and agriculture professionals who are scheduled to arrive in Durango today. The experts are set to help address concerns that residents have expressed about their livestock. Topics of concern surround the remaining sediment in ditches, canals, and the river.

“Test results from both the EPA and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment have shown that the water in the Animas River has returned to pre-incident levels,” said Liane Jollon, San Juan Basin Health Director. “We are very pleased to see these numbers drop to a normal level so quickly, and now sediment impacts are a top priority.”

Although the City of Durango has received notification from Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment that the City can begin to collect and treat water from the Animas River, the intake to the drinking water system from the Animas River remains closed. “The City is proceeding carefully to ensure the absolute safety of our drinking water, which is our top priority,” said Matt Holden, City of Durango Utilities Engineer.

Incident information is posted to the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department’s Website at www.sjbhd.org, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/LaPlataCounty, and

<http://www.facebook.com/sanjuanbasinhealth>; and EPA's website at www.epa.gov/goldkingmine. La Plata County has set up a call center for questions from citizens at 970-385-8700, open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Southern Ute Tribal members may call the Tribal Hotline at 970-563-5025.

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